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PIERRE DE RONSARD, "PRINCE OF POETS."

C RITICISM has perhaps seldom been more ignorant or more unfortunate than in the too-well-known lines in which Boileau contrasts the jejune talent of Malherbe, which he could appreciate, with the genius of Ronsard which he could not.

Ronsard, qui le (Marot) suivit, par un autre methode
Reglant tout, brouilla tout, fit un art à sa mode
Et, tout fois, eut longtemps un heureux destin,
Mais sa muse en françois parlant grec et latin,
Vit dans l'age suivant, par un retour grotesque,
Tomber de ses grands mots le faste pedantesque.
Ce poete orgueilleux, trebuché de si haut,
Rendit plus retenu Desportes et Bertaut.

These lines Saintsbury justly calls "as false in fact as they are imbecile in criticism," but they served to obscure the Pléiade, as Ronsard's school was called, from several generations of French poets, whose verses show clearly enough that they had sore need of its light. Indeed we must come to the romantic school of the present century, to Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, and their followers to find any genuine appreciation of Ronsard, and even then it is but a timid voice.

The virtues which Boileau praised in Malherbe were the blight of his own, and of all French verse, for generations. This is what he says:

Enfin Malherbe vint, et, le premier en France,
Fit sentir dans les vers une juste cadence,
D'un mot, mis à sa place enseigna le pouvoir
Et reduisit la muse aux règles du devoir.
Par ce sage écrivain la langue réparée
N'offrit plus rien de rude à l'oreille epurée,
Les stances avec grace apprirent à tomber
Et le vers sur le vers n'osa plus enjamber.

And so on, and so on, with this interminable "monotony in wire." The truth is that Malherbe "had the defects of his

qualities," to use a French expression, and the qualities were not originally his at all, but Ronsard's, of whom every word in these lines might be said with greater truth than of his somewhat dreary and pedantic successor. For the Pléiade in general, and Ronsard especially, were the first in France to preach and practise peculiar heed to the cadence of the single verse, while not for that neglecting the stanza, which the lyric poets before them had been disposed to regard as the unit in poetic composition. They were also first to reprove and regulate the once unbridled license in coining words and phrases while they permitted a just and wise liberty, as natural to their liberal training as it was abhorrent to Malherbe. Ronsard particularly insists with the greatest care both on the choice and place of words in poetic composition. In short every one of Boileau's assertions can be answered by a quotation either from Ronsard's Preface to the *Franciade* or from his *Abrégé de l' Art Poétique François*, as we shall see presently.

But to understand what the Pléiade was and what it undertook to do, we must consider briefly the state of poetry in France in the first half of the sixteenth century, we must consider "the pit whence it was digged." The preceding century had given France Charles d'Orleans and Villon. The former she had outgrown in spirit, and the easy verses of the latter were too full of local allusions and soon became too antiquated in language to maintain their place in popular esteem. Technically it is undeniable that Villon had a mastery of the stanza, and he is very strong in his command of appropriate epithets. But the bulk of his poetry is small, and of that a considerable portion is simply unintelligible jargon. He left no school. At least none of his immediate successors show signs of his influence. Rough satire and rude directness characterize Coquillart and Baude, while Martial d' Auvergne carries us back to the days of the simple pastorals.

The prevailing style of the fifteenth century poets in France, however, was neither theirs nor his, but rather the

hopelessly artificial allegory fostered by Chastelain and his school, who are usually known as the *Rhétoriciens*. Strained in subject and in form, their work is equally so in language. The grossest latinisms abound, and if Greek is less drawn upon it is only because it was less known. It was this style that survived and claimed the devoted admiration of the early sixteenth century. Crétin, whose name Rabelais has made a byword,¹ is to Marot what Virgil had been to Dante, the "soveran poet."

Such, then, was the condition of French poetry when the renaissance began to make itself felt as a literary force, manifesting itself in different ways and in varying degrees of intensity in the various branches of literature, as was natural; for France was in all Europe precisely the country where the old and new tendencies came in most immediate contact and sharpest conflict. On the one hand we find the ideals of the *Rhétoriciens* carried out, though modified to their advantage, by Jehan de Maire and Bouchet, while the convivial and satirical verses of Jehan de Pantalis and Roger de Collyere suggest the healthier tradition of Villon. But it may suffice here to recall the dictum of Saintsbury: "Perhaps no equal period in all early French history produced more and at the same time worse verse than the reign of Louis XII." (1498-1515). The second quarter of the century, however, was illustrated by a real poet, Marot, and it is by contrasting him with Ronsard that we gain a just appreciation of the latter's place and mission in French literary history.

That Marot was a man of independent and catholic taste appears in his choosing to edit Villon and in his love for the mediæval romances of his country, then out of fashion and hidden in a long eclipse, while his first work in contrast to these was itself a homage to the school of the *Rhétoriciens*. He bore witness also to the freedom of his thought by numerous and prolonged exiles from his native land, brought upon him

¹ Raminagrobis, in Rabelais' *Pantagruel*, iii. 21, seems certainly to be intended for Crétin.

by his devotion to the Protestant cause. He was a voluminous and in his day popular writer, but in later times the esteem in which he has been held, has been almost exactly in inverse ratio to that of Ronsard, for it was just that state of criticism and of popular taste that led Malherbe and his followers to attack Ronsard on the one hand, that fitted them on the other to enjoy Marot's smooth, easy, graceful, and somewhat shallow wit, while the sounder judgment of our day that has restored Ronsard to his due place has naturally relegated Marot to his.

It is a strange misconception to call Marot, as the school histories still are wont to do, the Father of French Poetry, for he is as clearly a legitimate descendant of the story-tellers of the *Fabliaux* as he is an ancestor of La Fontaine. If we may be permitted to cite Saintsbury once more, who is really admirable for this entire period, Marot "brought out the best aspects of the older French literature and cleared away some disfiguring encumbrances from it, but he imported nothing new." The same critic regards him as inferior to Charles d'Orleans in sentiment and to Villon in passion and humor. He was popular because he reflected the taste of his time, not because he led it, and in the outward form of verse and language his merit is rather in the good use he makes of what he finds than in any effort or desire to enrich either the one or the other. Nor can much more be said for his followers, not even for Mellin de St. Gelais, Ronsard's declared rival. The literature that had gone before, coupled with the wide diffusion of literary taste that came from the renaissance and from Italy, would have justified us in looking for such a poet as Marot, for he is the natural outgrowth of the literary conditions of his time. With Ronsard and his brothers of the Pléiade the case is different. They were conscious innovators, their advent could not have been anticipated and, indeed, is almost a unique fact in European literary history.

It was probably in 1541 that Pierre de Ronsard, then a travelled young soldier of seventeen, abandoned a career that had led him to Germany, to England, twice to Scotland, and

perhaps to Italy, a career that had brought him a shipwreck and a catarrh of the ear that nearly cost him his hearing; left all this with a sudden impulse for the studious retirement of the Collège Coqueret at Paris, and the much prized teachings of Daurat, already a scholar of wide and growing renown. Here by one of those providential coincidences he found a group of congenial companions that he would have sought in vain elsewhere in France. Belleau and Baif were already there. Du Bellay he had persuaded to accompany him from Poitiers. The famous dramatist Jodelle and Pontus de Tyard soon joined them. These constituted the seven stars of the Pléiade. Of them all Daurat alone, though the guiding spirit, was not actively productive, and a poetic fancy has dubbed him the "dark star" of this constellation. Yet it is no doubt to his inspiration, if not to his direct teaching, that we must attribute the rising ambition of this little group to inaugurate a reform in French literature, basing their efforts on the study of the classics and foreign languages but not, as has been sometimes hastily assumed, proposing to import classical or foreign forms, whether words or metres, bodily into their own tongue. Indeed, as we shall see presently, they are anxious to disavow any such intent and are unsparing in their satire and criticism of the pedantic latinizers among the *Rhétoriciens*.

In 1549 the group felt already sure enough of their ground to venture on a proclamation of their views and purposes. The preparation of their declaration was given to Du Bellay, who had perhaps been the leader in the school though he came soon to take a second place. He was a remarkable man, however, for though he died in 1560, when but thirty-five years old, being a year younger than Ronsard, yet in this brief space he produced a body of verse, short indeed, but which, both for its smallness and sustained worth suggests the work of the English poet Gray. But Du Bellay will always be best known for his proclamation of the principles of the brotherhood, the *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française*. Perhaps this may be more than just to him, how-

ever, for Ronsard in the *Discours à Loys des Masures*¹ makes Du Bellay's shade address him in these words:

Qui premier me poussas et me formas la vois
A celebrer l'honneur du langage François.

Thus he expressly states that it was to Ronsard that Du Bellay owed his philological inspiration, and this is made the more probable by the fact that it was but a year later that Ronsard published his Pindaric Odes with the express intention of illustrating the principles of the *Défense*.

The purpose of this famous pamphlet is to urge its readers who have entered the Greek and Roman camps "to escape from the midst of the Greeks and through the ranks of the Romans and enter the heart of their own well-beloved France," that is to bring with them from those foreign literatures what may be of value to their own. *Fas est ab hoste doceri* might have been their motto. "Our ancestors," continued Du Bellay, "have left our language to us so poor and bare that it has need of the ornaments, and if we may speak so, of the plumes of others. But, then, who would pretend that Greek or Latin were always as excellent as at the time of Horace or Demosthenes, of Virgil or Cicero? Our language is beginning to blossom again without bearing fruit, not surely by any fault in its nature, but rather by the fault of those who have had the care of it." To remedy this he continues, "It is not enough to translate. What must we do, then? We must imitate the Romans as they did the Greeks, as Cicero imitated Demosthenes, and Virgil, Homer. We must make the best authors part of ourselves and, after digesting them, turn them to blood and nourishment."

"Studies," he says, "are the wings by which the writings of men soar to heaven." But French verse has been too easy-going. The *chanson*, in his estimation, is hopelessly inferior to the ode as the vehicle of any noble poetic thought, inferior because too facile; so, too, he prefers the sonnet to the

¹ Ronsard, *Oeuvres* (edition Blanchemain) vii. 52.

eight or ten line poems made familiar to us by Marot. He was blinded here, as it seems to us, by the brilliancy of the Italian sonneteers, and perhaps he was open to the accusation that he approved what was foreign because it was foreign, rather than because it was good. But the same complaint cannot lie against his dramatic strictures and his commendation of the more regular comedy and tragedy, then known in France only through translations chiefly of Seneca, but soon to be established definitely by his friend and companion, Jodelle. It may be contended, however, we think successfully, that the example of contemporary Italy was more potent in this than that of ancient Rome.

Now, it seems to us probable that all thoughtful men who read widely in the French literature of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries will find the conviction deepen that the language as a vehicle of literary expression was in sore need of the infusion of new blood. Whence could this come if it were not from the more advanced literary culture of Italy and from the sources from which that literature had drawn its renewed life, the revival of classical learning? In their aims the Pléiade were thoroughly national and patriotic, and if there was an occasionally exaggerated ebullition, as there certainly was, in the main their course was sober and fruitful from the first, while they were quick to learn from their own errors, and their last work is among their best.

As has been said, Du Bellay's essay was followed closely by Ronsard's first collection of Odes, a youthful and not always successful application of the principles he professed. Of course it awakened violent criticism among the disciples of Marot, for Ronsard had a standing at court and was not to be ignored. It is of this time that the story is told how St. Gelais, his chief opponent, and later his good friend, tried to prejudice Ronsard's case before the king by reading his verses in a tone of parody, when Margaret of Savoy showed her generous nature and her appreciation of the new poet by snatching the volume from his rival's hand and reading the verses herself. Whether this be true or not, it is certain that Ron-

sard was from that time till his death popular both at court and among the people to a degree perhaps unrivalled in France, a fact which alone might make us hesitate to accept the dictum of those who call him pedantic. Indeed, the contemporary criticism was soon confined to the Huguenots who found no fault with the verses, but accused the man sometimes of being a priest, sometimes a licentious atheist, so far as can be seen without even the excuse of probability for their slanders. It will be remembered that Marot was a Protestant.

It is certain, however, that this first volume of odes has furnished a handle to Ronsard's detractors in later times, and has done more than any of them to obscure his fame. The benevolent Sainte-Beuve is constrained to denounce some of these imitations of Pindar as "detestable and almost unreadable." But after all these are comparatively few. They are the first labored flights of a new-fledged genius that was soon to soar on an easy and confident wing. His theory was better than his practice; he did not immediately attain the goal he sought, but he saw it clearly from the first. He states his ideas very well in his *Art of French Poetry*, first printed in 1565, from which we cite here the most characteristic and important passages:

"You should not," he says, "reject the old words of our romances, but select from them with a ripe and careful choice. Observe carefully the artizans of all trades, especially the smiths, for from them you may draw many rich and beautiful comparisons. . . . You must choose and appropriate dexterously to your work the most significant words of the dialects of our France, especially if you have not such good or suitable words in your own dialect, and you must not mind whether the words are of Gascony, of Poitiers, of Normandy, Manche, or Lyonnais, as long as they are good and signify exactly what you want to say. And do not affect too much the language of the court, which is sometimes very bad, because it is the language of ladies and of young gentlemen who make profession rather of fighting well than of

talking well. And observe that the Greek language would never have been so rich in dialects or in words had it not been for the great number of republics that flourished at that time . . . whence came many dialects, all held without distinction as good by the learned writers of those times. For a country can never be so perfect in all things that it cannot borrow sometimes from its neighbors, . . . though since our France obeys a single king, we are constrained, if we wish to attain any honor, to speak his language, otherwise our labor, however honorable and perfect it may be, will be little esteemed, or perhaps utterly despised."

In this we see no disposition to latinize. Indeed, Ronsard is so far from any such purpose that he says a little further on: "They who first dared to leave the classical tongue to honor that of their own country were truly fortunate men, and not ungrateful citizens, but rather worthy to be crowned in public statues, and worthy that from age to age we should make a perpetual memorial of them and of their virtues."

Again, in the Preface to the *Franciade*, he returns to the same subject, and says with even greater emphasis: "I want to encourage you to a wise boldness in inventing new words so long as they are molded and fashioned on a pattern already recognized by the people," a very keen-sighted and important limitation. "It is very hard to write well in our language unless it be enriched more than now by words and various modes of expression. Those who write it every day know very well what to think of it. It is very annoying always to use the same word. Then, too, I counsel you not to hesitate to restore old words, and especially those of the Wallon and Picard dialects, . . . and choose the most pregnant and significant words not only of that language, but of all the provinces of France, to serve your verse when you need them. . . . Besides, if old words, abolished by usage, have left some offshoot . . . you can prune, amend, and cultivate it," and he adds several examples, reminding us very much in all this of the saying of Dante, who asserted that in the *Divine Comedy* the language had never constrained

him to say what it would, but he had always compelled the language to say what he would. Indeed, we cannot but feel that however the case may be now in Academy-ridden France, Ronsard comprehended for his time very exactly what it meant to have a "mastery" of his native language.

That he would not under all circumstances have allowed himself as wide a liberty is clear from another sentence toward the close: "It is one thing to write in a flourishing language received now among people as living and natural, approved by kings, princes, senators, merchants and tradesmen; and another thing to write in a dead language, mute and buried under the silence of such a space of years." Here one may take no liberties, but "there is no reason to suppose that nature should be so prodigal of her gifts to two or three nations that she will not guard her wealth as well for the last as the first." It is because the French Academy has regarded the language as a mummy that you cannot read French books with its dictionary. The new school of French writers is to-day sitting at the feet of Ronsard and smiles approval as the old man says: "I counsel you, as I have said, to use all dialects indifferently. Among them the court language is the most refined, but it cannot be perfect without the aid of the others, for each garden has its particular flower. . . . I counsel you to learn Greek and Latin, and Spanish and Italian too, and when you know them perfectly then come back under your own flag like a good soldier and write in your mother tongue as did Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Virgil, Livy, Sallust, Lucretius, and a thousand others, who spoke the language of laborers, and man-servants, and chamber-girls.* It is high treason to abandon the language of one's country, living and growing, to try to unearth some ashes of the ancients. It would be more worthy of a good bourgeois or citizen to hunt up and make a lexicon of the old words in 'Arthur,' 'Launcelot,' and 'Gawain,' or to comment on the 'Romance of the Rose,' than to amuse one's self with some musty Latin grammar."

Let it be remembered that these sentences were written

before Montaigne had taught in his essays an easy prose style. There is a vigor and brilliancy here which, of course, is much obscured in translation. One must have read widely in the prose that preceded Ronsard, however, to appreciate what an enormous advance his work marked, though the praise must be shared in large measure with Du Bellay. But we have ventured on these long quotations less on this account than because they seem to us the most important contemporary testimony to the way the builders of our modern languages felt toward the work they were bringing to its consummation in this sixteenth century both in France and in Spain, in Germany and in England. Political unity gives the first impulse. A court language arises that imposes itself on a territory much larger than the original fiefs, and corresponds more or less to our modern divisions. This court language does not indeed impose itself by edict, perhaps it is not universally taught in the schools, and it is certainly not generally talked by the common people, but it is recognized by literary men as the only road to eminence and general national renown. Dialects then take a wholly subordinate place from whence they never emerge, but the court language is, after all, only one of the dialects, the strongest and best, no doubt, but, as we know, and as Ronsard felt, capable of improvement and enrichment by adaptations from all its neighbors, and by scholarly importations also, if only they are "on a pattern already recognized by the people." This is a phase of every European language though the development is different in each of them, both in regard to structure and to vocabulary. Ronsard's work was what he thought it was, truly patriotic, a work by which he and his friends did for France what a century of writers did unconsciously for England. He has been compared with the English Euphuists. It would be more just to compare him in this respect with Luther, though of course there is contrast as well as likeness.

It is very strange that the debt of the French language to Ronsard should ever have been forgotten. His contempora-

ries, by a strange reversal of the usual fate of poets, were more just to him than his copyists and the heirs of his rich heritage. Men whose names are better known in the world of to-day than his own, recognized his unquestioned superiority. Tasso, who was in Paris in 1571, was zealous to submit to him his first cantos of *Jerusalem Delivered*, and was proud to win the approval of a man who probably does not count one reader to his hundred. Pasquier went so far as to pronounce that "all is admirable in him," and the renowned critic Scaliger was of much the same opinion. Montaigne thought that in him French poetry had reached its zenith, and that Ronsard was the peer of the ancients. To-day Montaigne is translated and retranslated, printed in cheap and annotated editions, yes, even served up for the American schoolboy, and Ronsard must still listen to the text-books of the literature he did so much to create as they laboriously explain this "error of half a century" in his favor. But the ungratefulness of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be excused by their characteristic indolent and complacent ignorance of their literary history; not so that of Malherbe who actually copies the forms he ridicules.

But let us return to Ronsard that we may endeavor to judge his title to live as a poet as well as a reformer. If we turn to an early edition of his works we shall find placed in the front rank a group of poems called *Amours*.¹ It is pleasanter to enter his poetic garden by this rustic bridge than to force our way to the Sleeping Beauty through the thorn hedge of the Pindaric Odes. Ronsard was a religious man, though not an ascetic one. The standards of his time were liberal, however, he was a poet of delicate and strong feelings, and two or perhaps three of the women to whom these *Amours* are addressed seem to have smiled on his suit. The first,

¹This is also the order preserved in Sainte-Beuve's volume of extracts from Ronsard (Paris, Garnier Frères) from which all the citations that follow are taken. The selections are very well made and the notes and comments very helpful. The standard complete edition of Ronsard is that of P. Blanchemain in seven volumes. Paris, 1867.

Cassandre, was a maid of Blois. His earliest verses to her were sonnets, usually studied from Petrarch, but not without original flashes of great beauty. Ronsard, though not the first to write, was the first to popularize the sonnet in France, which gives these, his first ventures in this well-worn field, a peculiar interest. But we, at least, feel less disposed to thank him for the importations than for the graceful stanzas, often quite original in their metres, which he intermingled with them. It is in these that we first see the exquisite humor and delicate touch which raise him so far above any poet that had preceded him. There was probably not one among them all who could have written lines like these addressed to his coy lady-love:

Donques tandis que tu vis
Change, maitresse, d' avis,
Et ne m' espargne ta bouche.
Incontinent tu mourras:
Lors tu te repentiras
De m' avoir esté farouche.

These lines may be taken as quite as characteristic of the young Ronsard as the Pindaric Odes. Surely it will not be said that they smack obtrusively of the classical pedant. As time goes on he feels more sure of himself, however, and in the *Amours de Marie*, a plain country girl as it seems, who succeeded Cassandre in the poet's young heart and died before she had ceased to fill it, he shows a more free and conscious power. What can breathe more of the fresh spirit of happy love than this close to one of the earlier sonnets in this group:

Harsoir (Hier soir) en vous couchant vous jurastes vos yeux,
D' estre plustost que moy ce matin esveillée;
Mais le dormir de l' aube, aux filles gracieux,
Vous tient d' un doux sommeil encore les yeux sillée.
Ça! Ça! Que je les baise et vostre beau tetin
Cent fois pour vous apprendre à vous lever plus matin.

One hardly knows where to stop in one's citations of these charming songs. But there is one, which Sainte-Beuve especially admired, that we find quite irresistible. He begins

by lamenting the cruelty of his mistress who keeps his heart prisoner. He threatens to rebel, but at that very instant finds himself frightened at his own daring. The abrupt change of tone is delightful in its sly humor and the close is most pathetically tender:

Une autre moins belle que toy,
 Mais bien de meilleure nature,
 Le (i. e. *my heart*) voudroit bien avoir de moy,
 Elle l' aura, je te le jure :
 Elle l' aura—puisque autrement
 Il n' a de toy bon traitement.

Mais non, j' aime trop mieux qu'il meure
 Sans esperance en ta prison :
 J' aime trop mieux qu'il y demeure
 Mort de douleur contre raison,
 Qu' en te changeant jouir de celle
 Qui m' est plus douce mais non si belle.

This last is indeed, as Sainte-Beuve has said, "an exquisite verse." Certainly it is not his critics who have written better.

Nestling among these sonnets and songs we find an eclogue, which is not without charm, but which shows us also the weak side of Ronsard's genius, a disposition to intrude classical lore. It describes a journey of Baif and Ronsard to Tours, and their meeting with their lady-loves there, under the form of a pastoral, a form that seems to invite and foreshadow failure. If we have to thank him on the one side for realistic touches of country life, on the other we shiver at the dreary cold of his classic ghosts, Glaucus, Atalanta, Hesperia, and the rest. In all this, of course, Ronsard is no worse than his contemporaries, but "the best in this kind are but shadows," and we expect Ronsard to be better.

A third group of love poems is addressed to Astrée, a name that seems to disguise a lady of the family of Estrée. Here too are charming verses, but less feeling and so more tendency to artificiality. This becomes even more marked in the very platonic affection of the *Poésies pour Hélène*, almost all of which are studied from classical or Italian models, as his editors have shown, and which have as much of the fresh

life of the sixteenth century in them as that fact would lead us to anticipate. But there are fine lines here too. It would be hard to find a tercet more bitter and strong than this:

Dieux, vous estes jaloux et pleins de cruauté!
Des dames sans retour s'envole la beauté;
Aux serpents tous les ans vous ostez la veillesse.

Among these verses there is an elegy that contains a valuable hint of Ronsard's intellectual equipment. He says that after six years of love he has emancipated his heart from its bonds and now lives at ease:

Ayant tous jours ès mains pour me servir de guide
Aristote ou Platon ou le docte Euripide,
Mes bons hostes muets qui ne faschent jamais.

These lines recall Southey's to his books. In connection with this expression of his love of studies in middle life we may cite here a sonnet of his earlier period which appears among the *Poésies Diverses*:

Je veux lire en trois jours l'Iliade d'Homere
Pour ce, Corydon, ferme bien l'huis sur moy
Je veuz trois jours entiers demeurer á requoy,
Pour follastrer après, une sepmaine entiere.

Probably Ronsard was the only French poet who ever wanted to lock himself up three days with Homer or lived on such friendly terms with Euripides, Aristotle and Plato. No poet of his day at least was so close to Helicon.

A little group of verses addressed to Villeroy, written toward the close of Ronsard's life, concludes this portion of his work. We note it here because of a song which anticipates the metre of Malherbe's *Complainte à Desperriers*, whose regular verses and moral platitudes have commended it to generations of French schoolmasters. For our own part, though diligently drilled in Malherbe's stanzas, we never realized the beauty of their metre till we rediscovered it in Ronsard. The voice of the philistine majority is against

us, however, for the philistine does not wish to have gone to school in vain.

The odes usually follow the lighter compositions in the editions of Ronsard. He probably regarded these as his best title to fame, but a poet is hardly ever a sound critic of his works; still there is undeniably very good poetry among them. To our taste they are good in proportion as they are independent of classical models. The famous ode addressed to Michel de l' Hospital with its interminable strophes, antistrophes and epodes, shall not lack our condemnation for all its charming lines and images which indeed no such man as he could avoid. We prefer this sort of thing in Greek. We are willing to take it for granted that Ronsard can imitate the metres of Alcæus, Anacreon, Simonides, Stesichorus, "*mon grand Pindare*," and of Horace whose Ode iv. 9 he is copying in his allusions to them; what we want is to see him catch their spirit. And we shall not look in vain in a collection that embraces that *pièce de resistance* of every French lyric anthology: *Mignonne, allons voir si la rose*, and the no less charming, though less hackneyed: *Ma petite colombelle*, that need not fear the comparison with Catullus it naturally suggests. Then, too, we shall find here the "Wet Cupid," that he borrowed from Anacreon, as did La Fontaine, whom we find in this case inferior, and Sainte-Beuve "not always superior, to the old poet." But when this same critic bids us admire the regular stanzas of an imitation of the first ode of Horace addressed to Pisseleu, we agree indeed with him that here Ronsard anticipates the chief boast of Malherbe, but while we see we do not admire, esteeming regularity a fault when it is bought at the price of monotony. More to our taste is the delicious imitation of Bion's "Cupid's School." Venus has taken Cupid to Ronsard to be taught the lyre, but the little god mocks him, and then:

Il me dit tout ses attraits,
Tout ses jeux, et de quels traits
Il blesse les fantaisies

Et des hommes et des dieux
Tous ses tourments gracieux,
Et toutes ses jalousies.

Et me les disant alors
J' oubliai tous les accors
De ma lyre dedaignée
Pour retenir en leur lieu
L' autre chanson que ce dieu
M' avoit par coeur enseignée.

We would gladly linger longer over these odes, the more as the next work of Ronsard's that confronts us with its forbidding bulk is certainly and easily his worst. It is *La Franciade*, an attempt to do for France in the sixteenth century what Virgil had done for Italy before the first. Begun under Henry II., and continued under the patronage of Charles IX. who apparently thought it was the proper thing, it had evidently already become distasteful to Ronsard when the death of that prince took from him the only motive for its completion. We thank Ronsard, as Cicero did the bad poet of schoolboy immortality, for the twenty cantos he omitted more than for the four he published, and those who love his memory can but regret that part of his preface to these cantos in which he gives a recipe, quite in the cook-book style, for the composition of an heroic poem; so hopelessly artificial was the form, so perfunctory the poet's conception of the task. But after all, it is not much worse, indeed we are not sure that it is not better, than the *Henriade* of Voltaire.

The *Franciade* was written under royal smiles, the *Bocage Royal* was written to win them. The style is somewhat similar, the flattery is exhibited in heroic doses that would be nauseating to persons of weaker stomachs than Catherine de Medici and Good Queen Bess. On the whole, if what we write should lead any to read Ronsard, we hope he will not read the *Bocage Royal* till he has grown fond enough of his author to pardon him. We are somewhat tempted to make a similar reserve for the eclogues, which like the odes suffer from being studied too closely from classical models. These

dialogues in which, time and again, two shepherds dispute the prize of song which the third finally decides is equally due to both, and we to neither, become very wearisome. We can find beauties if we look for them, to be sure, good descriptions of nature, some admirably poetic epithets, and now and then a spirited woodland combat of some nymph with an amorous satyr at which dimpled Cupids smile their light-hearted approval, but the general effect is somewhat tedious.

Ronsard's happiest efforts in Alexandrine lines are his elegies, but here, too, his verses flow more trippingly in decasyllables. Let the curious reader compare the lines to Genèvre beginning, "Le temps se passe, et se passant, madame," with those others beginning, "Hier quand bouche à bouche, assis auprès de vous," and both with La Fontaine's similar measures. What easy grace there is in these lines and what a sting at the close! He has been telling of the various and volatile passions of Venus:

Puis se faschant d' Adonis, fut eprise
D' un pastoureau, d' un Phrygian Anchise
Qui habitoit le sommet Idean:
Puis en laissant ce pasteur Phrygian
Aima Paris de la mesme contrée,
Tant elle fut de son plaisir outrée,
Elle fit bien d' avoir de tous pitié
Rien n' est si sot qu' une vieille amitié.

This recalls Campbell's charming stanzas: "Love he comes and Love he tarries, Just as fate or fancy carries," *et reliqua*.

Of the *Hymnes* and *Poèmes* of Ronsard little need be said. The mythology is strained and the poet is striving after an excellence that is not his. One of the latter collection, however, derives an adventitious interest from its dedication to Mary Queen of Scots, once a patron of the poet, but now in prison; yet Ronsard is far from rising to the tragedy of the occasion. On the other hand in the *Gaietés*, the last classified group of his poems, he is at home again and is thoroughly delightful. Indeed he is always at his best when he lets his heart swell freely with the joy of life and overflow in natural

melody. Let us take for instance his poem on the Skylark. It is as characteristic of the spirit of France and of his time as Shelley's is of England and of his. Ronsard has never been sicklied o'er with the cast of thought, he is not looking for "green isles in the deep, wide sea of misery." His skylark is a charming bird to be enjoyed, not to be yearned for as the symbol of what she is not. Shelley's skylark "singing still doth soar;" Ronsard has observed that his doesn't, but he manages to make a very charming picture of her return to earth:

Quand ton chant t' a bien amusée,
De l' air tu tombes en fusée
Qu' une jeune pucelle au soir
De sa quenouille laisse choir
Quand au fouyer elle sommeille,
Frappant son sein de son aurette;
Ou bien quand en filant le jour
Voit celui qui luy fait l' amour
Venir près d' elle à l' impourveue,
De honte elle abaisse la veue,
Et son tors fuseau delié
Loin de sa main roule à son pié.
Ainsi tu roules, allouette,
Ma doucellette mignonnette,
Qui plus qu' un rossignol me plais
Qui chante en un bocage espais.

We cannot close better than with these exquisite lines this brief appreciation of the work and works of Ronsard. Nor will we linger over the pleasant picture of his declining years, crowned with "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends," and with a peaceful and holy death, on the 27th of December, 1585, at his Priory of St. Cosme, near Tours. Our aim is rather to awaken interest than to satisfy it, for while Ronsard does not lack panegyrists and "fit company though few" of readers at home, we hardly think English critics have given him his full meed of praise. It seems to us that our time with its strongly marked realistic tendency in literature is peculiarly fitted to enjoy the healthy natural-

ism of Ronsard, and perhaps the very fact that our ears are not drilled in modern French prosody might remove one bar to our enjoyment of his still unfettered verses. If, as Xerxes found, it is impossible to invent a new pleasure, it is delightful to rediscover neglected ones, and that we hope may be the fortune of some of our readers. In any case we wish to claim for Ronsard that he did more than any one man to form the literary language of France, and that he gave its literature more of permanent value than any poet before the age of Louis XIV.

B. W. WELLS.